

ERIE-NIAGARA REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP
INSTITUTE FOR LOCAL GOVERNANCE AND REGIONAL GROWTH
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Co-Chairs:

Hon. Sean O'Connor
Hon. Barry Weinstein, MD

Members:

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Robert Blanchard
Daniel Boody
Hon. Clyde Burmaster
Hon. Elise Cusack
Hon. William Davignon
Brian Eldridge
Hon. Wright Ellis
Samuel Ferraro
Hon. Judith Fisher
Hon. Samuel Granieri
Hon. Dale Larson
Celeste Lawson
Maria Lehman
Hon. Peter McMahon
Hon. Gerald Meal
Lawrence Meckler
Hal Morse
Laurence Rubin
Laura St. Pierre
Hon. Mark Schroeder
Hon. Demone Smith
Hector Titus
Charles Webb
Peter Wendel
Lawrence Witul

Minutes of Erie-Niagara Regional Partnership Meeting
September 26, 2003

Present: Weinstein, Burmaster, Blanchard, Ellis, Ferraro, Lawson, McMahon, Meal, Meckler (proxy), Morse (proxy), St. Pierre, Titus, Webb (proxy), Wendel, Casale, Doolittle (proxy), Geiger (proxy), Sheffer

Excused: O'Connor, Allen, Cusack, Davignon, Eldridge

Absent: Boody, Fisher, Granieri, Larson, Lehman, Rubin, Schroeder, Smith, Witul, Rosenwasser

The meeting was called to order at 8:33 a.m. by Erie-Niagara Regional Partnership Co-Chair Barry Weinstein, MD and ENRP Acting Co-Chair Clyde Burmaster.

Ad Hoc:

Michael Casale
Tim Doolittle
Richard Geiger
David Rosenwasser
John Sheffer, II

Minutes of the July, 2003 meeting were approved.

Subcommittee Chair Hector Titus presented the Economic Development Subcommittee report. The report was received and filed, with **approval granted to request that the Niagara and Erie County Legislatures grant a four-year extension for a Niagara County regional agriculture project, and that funds remain dedicated to this project.**

Administrator:

Tod A. Kniazuk

Subcommittee Chair Peter McMahon presented the Government Affairs Subcommittee report. The report was received and filed, with **approval granted to offer the ENRP Government Affairs Subcommittee's services to market electronic permitting along with the Buffalo Niagara Partnership and the two counties' planning departments.** On the issue of 2004 funding for the Regional Economic Development Database, Jo Nasoff (proxy for ENRP Member Charles Webb) indicated that the ECIDA has concerns regarding their role in the funding of the REDD, and that their concerns will be discussed with the Buffalo Niagara Enterprise. ENRP Member Samuel Ferraro added that Niagara County is still waiting for a response from BNE regarding Niagara County's role in the REDD. Overall, however, Burmaster asserted that there is a will for REDD to continue.

Subcommittee Chair Robert Blanchard presented the Tourism & Culture Subcommittee report. The report was received and filed, with **approval granted for the ENRP to offer its support to the Buffalo Niagara Convention and Visitors Bureau in the creation of a tourist transportation link between Buffalo and Niagara Falls, with an amendment that the Niagara Tourism and Convention Corporation be an explicit partner as well.** Blanchard also gave an update on the Regional Cultural Tourism Initiative, inviting everyone to become involved in the project.

Subcommittee Member Peter Wendel presented the Transportation Subcommittee report. The report was received and filed, with **approval granted to pursue the recommended pilot sites for the job development and transportation project – the Buffalo Niagara International Airport/Walden Ave. corridor in Erie County and the Seneca Niagara Casino/Niagara Falls International Airport corridor in Niagara County.**

ENRP Ad Hoc Member John Sheffer gave updates on the REDD, Regional Economic Development Strategy, and electronic permitting, noting that all three are coming to critical points within the next several weeks.

A multi-part report on waterfront development/redevelopment projects began with a presentation by David Stebbins, waterfront development coordinator for the ECIDA. Stebbins handed out a sheet detailing 10 projects currently underway or in development with involvement by Empire State Development, the City of Buffalo, ECIDA, Erie County, the US Army Corps of Engineers, the NFTA, and NYSDOT. The projects are the Waterfront Parking Structure, Buffalo Intermodal Transportation (on hold pending decision on Aud location by Bass Pro), Greenway Trail, Tifft Street Greenway, Union Ship Canal, Erie Canal Harbor, Times Beach Restoration, Outer Harbor Greenbelt, Buffalo Boat Harbor, and Southtowns Connector/Outer Harbor.

Over \$100 million in public investment has been secured, with only the Southtowns Connector project remaining significantly unfunded. That project, however, has been identified as a major priority for TEA 21 reauthorization, and it is hoped that \$45 to \$50 million of the \$150 million project cost will be included in the reauthorization.

These projects will result in improved access and amenities with a goal of attracting businesses to the area. The Outer Harbor project is being funded as a brownfield redevelopment, but will also provide shoreline protection and access. The Union Ship Canal has been renamed Buffalo Lakeside Commerce Park, and has recently secured its first tenant. When all projects

are completed Erie County will have a trail system in place from Tonawanda to Lackawanna.

Empire State Development WNY Region Director of Research and Planning Tomas Blanchard, Jr. next updated the group on the Erie Canal Harbor project. Three alternatives for the master plan have recently been presented, and the preferred alternative will be selected by November, 2003. A supplemental environmental impact statement will be completed in March, 2004, with completed designs and bid solicitation in later 2004. Construction should start soon thereafter, with a completion date of 2007. Major features of the project include the naval and veterans park, rewatering the original commercial slip, a public plaza, a portion of the wharf reinterpreted, a south basin for local and out of town tour boats, an area set aside for cruise ships, and development sites.

ENRP Member Celeste Lawson asked if any of this project was subject to the City of Buffalo's One Percent for Public Art program, in which one percent of the total cost for public projects must be allocated for art. She also asked if funding was secure for the project. Stebbins replied that the funding is secure, but that he does not know if the One Percent program is applicable to the project.

The final portion of the presentation was given by David Colligan of the Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy, and dealt with a proposed linear park along the waterfront from the Niagara Gorge through to southern Erie County. Colligan noted that there have been several segmented plans for parts of the system, but there is an opportunity to coordinate these projects, especially in the context of the power relicensing's cultural, recreational, and land use aspects. To that end, GBNRTC and the Friends of the Buffalo Niagara River partnered in a grant application to the National Parks Service to secure money to hire a facilitator to bring together the many players in an effort to discuss coordination of efforts. Various federal, state, and local officials have supported this application, and ENRP is now being asked to lend its support as well. **The issue was referred to the ENRP Transportation Subcommittee.**

Ferraro asked if other waterfront plans such as the Western Erie Canal Heritage Corridor Management Plan would be included, to which Colligan responded that there is no plan for them to be included in; what the application seeks is merely to bring together all the players to discuss the possibility of creating a plan – although he fully expects that all the plans would work together.

Ferraro gave an update on the Framework for Regional Growth. He noted the Framework's coordination with the Regional Economic Development Strategy, which will in turn be a component of the Framework.

The first two work products – an interview summary and a powers & authorities piece – will be released soon.

Ferraro also gave an update on power relicensing. The September and October meetings have been postponed until November and December. Subcommittees will be reconstituted after January to deal with the 40 studies the consultants are preparing. The settlement process will also recommence at that time. Weinstein noted that the Erie County Legislature received a request from a member of the New York State Assembly calling for a power allocation study. Ferraro replied that the Relicensing Consensus Committee's Low Cost Power Subcommittee had done some work on the issue, and so the aforementioned request would be referred to the RCC's Low Cost Power Subcommittee.

Under old and new business, Lawson mentioned the recent meeting with New York State Assemblymember Joseph Morelle regarding proposed culture zone legislation. The concept is similar to empire zones but the focus is on clusters of cultural and businesses that cater to them. There could be a role for ENRP in this process. **The issue was referred to the ENRP Tourism & Culture Subcommittee.**

Also under old and new business, ENRP Member Wright Ellis inquired about an alleged controversy regarding 2004 visitors guides between the BNCVB and the NTCC, where it was asserted that the BNCVB was selling space by saying that the NTCC wouldn't be producing a guide. BNCVB representative David Lacki (representing ENRP Ad Hoc Member Richard Geiger) replied that no such statements were made that he was aware of. Niagara County attractions have always been listed in the BNCVB guide, but for the first time this year Niagara County hotels could purchase ad space if they so chose. Those hotels, however, were aware of the NTCC's guide.

Lacki brought another issue to the table under old and new business – NYS Parks parking fees. Bus parking fees on Goat Island were raised significantly in mid-summer, and there is no drop off on the island. This is a real problem.

The next meeting – ENRP's Five Year Anniversary Reception and Meeting – will take place Friday, December 5 at 8:30 a.m. in Erie County at the University Inn and Conference Center (2402 North Forest Rd., Amherst). The meeting was adjourned at 10:03 a.m.

Submitted by Tod A. Kniazuk
November 26, 2003